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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PM](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA: MOSCOSO ACTIVELY SHAPING OPPOSITION

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR BRIAN R. NARANJO. REASONS 1.4 (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Asserting the Panamenista Party would not have a presidential candidate for Panama's May 2009 elections, former President Mireya Moscoso told POLCOUNS on March 27 that she would work to unify the opposition and have the Panamenista Party enter into a coalition with a viable presidential aspirant. While Panamenista Party President Juan Carlos Varela might be the titular party head and control the party structure on paper, Moscoso asked rhetorically, "Why are opposition leaders beating a path to my door if I'm just a simple Panamenista Party member?" Predicting a bloodbath within the governing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), she said that it was imperative that the Panamenista Party stop seeking accommodation with the PRD, begin opposing the PRD-led government, and lead (under her direction) the opposition to unify for the 2009 elections. Through a process of elimination of prospective opposition presidential contenders, Moscoso suggested that the Panamenista party would support former President Guillermo Endara. End summary.

La Dona on the Move

¶2. (C) Moscoso said that she had attempted to give Varela the space he needed to lead the Panamenista Party, but that Varela had repeatedly failed to lead by opposing the PRD-led government, but rather preferred to seek accommodation. She said that she was incensed by the personal assaults that she had suffered, including Varela's recent barb that there was a former female president who deserved to be in prison; "Now is the time for me to act." (Note: Moscoso is Panama's only female ex-president.) Varela had passed up numerous opportunities to oppose the government, such as: penal and judicial code reform, transportation, and the UNDP-led national dialogue. She asked, "Why is Varela the only opposition leader participating in Torrijos' national dialogue?"

¶3. (C) Moscoso said that she had begun a series of visits throughout Panama and had begun to receive a number of opposition leaders who wished to consult with her, including former President Guillermo Endara and Patriotic Union party co-presidents Jose Mulino and Anibal Galindo. "Varela is the president of my party and controls the formal apparatus," she

said, "but I am the effective leader of the party who is in touch with the party's bases." She explained that she would not seek an "extraordinary party convention" to topple Varela and replace him with leadership that was in synch with the party's bases. Varela would likely challenge the results by taking his case to Panama's Electoral Tribunal. "We are not going to let the PRD-controlled Electoral Tribunal meddle in our internal affairs," she said, adding, "We need to do the best we can with the party that we have now."

Panamenistas to Back Endara?

14. (C) Lamenting that her party for the first time in its history was unlikely to have a presidential candidate capable of leading the opposition ticket, Moscoso said that the Panamenista Party would need to enter into a coalition to support another party's presidential contender. She was dismissive of the Panamenista presidential prospects, including Varela, Marco Ameglio, Jose Miguel Aleman, Jose Miguel Teran, and Alberto Vallarino, the last of which ran in 2004 as an independent after failing to secure the Panamenista nomination. (Vallarino and his then-campaign manager Varela were expelled from the Panamenista party for breaking with party solidarity and were subsequently readmitted.) Moscoso had nothing but invective for Democratic Change (CD) Party President Ricardo Martinelli who currently leads the polls among opposition presidential aspirants. Referring to Martinelli as a "nut" and "crazy," she said that she would not permit her party to enter into a coalition with Martinelli. Moscoso said she thought that former VP Billy Ford joined the Patriotic Union (UP) party in the "vain" hope that he would be it's presidential candidate; UP "will end up supporting the PRD candidate."

15. (C) Moscoso acknowledged that, by process of elimination of prospective presidential candidates, former President Guillermo Endara would be the sole remaining candidate that the Panamenistas could support. Her recent public lunch with Endara, Moscoso said, had helped the two former presidents put past differences behind them. Endara knew that his new party, Moral Vanguard of the Nation (VMP), had to have Panamenista support if he were to have success, she said. (Note: Endara's long-time political advisor Menalco Solis told POLCOUNS on March 13 that Endara would form a coalition with the Panamenistas and that Panamenista support and nationwide party structure were essential to an Endara victory.) Stopping short of saying outright that the Panamenista party would form a coalition with Endara at the top of the ticket, Moscoso noted that there was plenty of time to form formal alliances for the May 2009 elections.

Comment

16. (C) Moscoso is frustrated by the current state of her Panamenista Party led by Varela, dismayed at the opposition's disarray in which the leading presidential aspirant is firebrand Martinelli, and fearful that the opposition will not capitalize on PRD fissures as the PRD determines its own leadership and selects its own presidential candidate. Her assessment that former President Ernesto "El Toro" Perez Balladares would emerge as the PRD's presidential candidate reflected her desire to paint a gloom and doom picture for the U.S., probably with the hope that the U.S. would help unify the opposition; Embassy Panama is not taking that bait. Nonetheless, shrewd in her assessments and ruthless in her tactics, Moscoso remains a political operator with whom to remain engaged.

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